

Nuala Young- Address to Full Council Dec.17th. 2012

It is with great reluctance that I have decided to come back to address this Council. In my years as councillor I came to realise that councillors of the ruling party were not interested in open debate, but would come to the Council meetings with their minds already made up and no room for reconsideration of issues in response to new information or ideas. Indeed when I asked Councillor Price if he was sorry that so few of his councillors contributed to the debates, he told me that he was glad of it and hoped it would stay like that.

However I don't think we should accept this type of autocracy. Our culture is based on the idea of debate and it is only in the last century that party politicians have been frightened by our media corporations from showing any disagreement or daring to have any open debate.

It is not surprising that people have insisted on keeping open the debate on the Council's proposal to demolish a local and much needed pool in order to partly fund a new pool in a less central location that will be no bigger and actually have fewer facilities.

Policy SR 15 of the Oxford Local Plan. States that

“Planning permission will not be granted for development that would result in the loss of community facilities where there is a need for the facility to be retained in its current location.”

There is a good reason for this. People need their facilities to be nearby.

‘Accessible’ means via walking, cycling, numerous bus routes. Temple Cowley Pools is accessible to a number of surrounding communities, among them the wards of St. Clements, St. Marys, Lye Valley, Rose Hill, Florence Park.

Apparently the Council's lawyers are claiming that the pool on the edge of Blackbird Leys is “local”. I think common sense tells us that this is stretching the meaning of “local” to make it almost meaningless. This is a piece of sophistry and , not necessarily a legally sound position. It is quite obvious to anyone who is standing outside Temple Cowley that a lot of people do access the pool on foot and by bike. Children from three schools walk to it. It is truly local in a way that a Blackbird Leys Pool will not be for the present users.

Councillor Clarkson in urging us in a past Council meeting to accept the new pool, has suggested that it will be easier for people to drive there . Surely this is not the intelligent way to be planning our community facilities. For reasons of climate change we really should be looking at how to cut car use in our city.

A government report has concluded that a third of our schoolchildren around the ages of 10 and 11 are overweight and unfit. We should be encouraging

them to use the swimming facility and, ideally, to walk or cycle to it. In a city of 2 rivers we need to encourage all our children to learn to swim. There is a need for the facility to be retained in its present position.

Children whose parents cannot afford to send them to private schools, can no longer afford a car or hefty bus fares, still deserve to be able to go to a local pool to learn to swim and enjoy the fun of diving and other water sports.

It is time to rethink. It is important that the other parties on the Council agree not to look negatively on such a rethink and applaud the ruling group for having the strength and intelligence to look at this whole matter again.

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